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SUBJECT: SERBIA: VOJVODINA POLITICS -- POOR MAN'S ENTERTAINMENT

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) Two of Vojvodina's most influential political leaders portrayed their political ideology as flexible in their efforts to secure the most votes and their own political futures. Novi Sad mayor and candidate Maja Gojkovic affirmed she is no longer a Radical party member and expressed her future political ambitions on the national level. Nenad Canak, head of the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats (LSV) explained that his coalition with President and Democratic Party (DS) leader Boris Tadic is politically expedient, even though there remain differences between them. End Summary.

The Break-Up: Gojkovic and the radicals

¶2. (SBU) Novi Sad Mayor Maja Gojkovic told the DCM March 21 she had definitively broken away from the Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Though Gojkovic stressed the decision to leave the party was hers, the SRS made her choice an easy one. "No one told me I was no longer part of the party," she said, comparing her experience to the main character in the 1998 film, "The Truman Show", who is unaware he lives in a constructed reality for the entertainment of those outside it. She insisted the split did not happen two years ago, as some have speculated, but was more recent.

¶3. (SBU) In a surprising confession, she told the DCM she would not choose an association with the SRS and its leader Vojislav Seselj, now on trial for war crimes in The Hague, if she had to do it all over again. As if to prove their falling out, she said she had not spoken with Seselj since 2004, when he called to tell her he was unhappy with the way she was running her mayoral campaign. "He promised at the time he would call 'tomorrow.' That tomorrow never came," she said.

¶4. (SBU) Gojkovic was restrained in her comments on Tomislav Nikolic. She said he had worked on sounding more educated during his recent run for President, but admitted he had made a few mistakes. When asked whether she thought of a possible DSS-SRS coalition following upcoming May elections, she said it was possible, but wondered what Nikolic could bring to the table.

the single life: Citizens Organization of Maja Gojkovic

¶5. (SBU) For a woman who admitted to DCM she only reads the news when she's the story, it is far from surprising that she has named her new citizen group -- which she emphasized was not a political party -- the Citizens Organization of Maja Gojkovic in Novi Sad. According to Gojkovic, the group comprises of professionals, women, young people, all who are looking for a better future, and have not been able to find what they are looking for after taking part of various other political movements.

¶6. (SBU) When asked who her main opponents for mayor of Novi Sad would be in May 11 elections, she named President of the Novi Sad SRS Igor Mirovic, a "classic Radical," President of the Executive Council of Vojvodina Bojan Pajtic (DS), "known in Vojvodina, but perhaps lacking ambition," and occasional DSS spokesperson Branislav Ristivojevic who is also a key advisor to Kostunica. In response to DCM comment that Canak was also on the list, (referencing a March 21 newspaper article), Gojkovic said she was not aware Canak was in the running but claimed he "is not popular in Novi Sad; not politically anyway." Referring to Canak as a comrade, she added that "political parties have

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the same faces. We need someone new, or people no longer believe in them."

¶7. (SBU) Gojkovic said all parties had reached out to her as a potential ally, chalking it up to the fact that she left the Radicals and was "interesting." In a March 23 interview, she told the daily newspaper Blic she was talking with the DS about supporting DS during the parliamentary elections in May. Some press outlets are speculating that Gojkovic is trying to parlay her potential support for DS during parliamentary elections for backing in her re-election bid for mayor.

Gojkovic: "I will be President of Serbia"

¶8. (SBU) Stridently confident, Gojkovic told the DCM she believed she would one day be President of Serbia. She said she was unimpressed by parties on either side of the political spectrum. She claimed Serbia had no political center, but felt she could establish it. She plans to run in 2012, though believed she would get the opportunity earlier. The hallmark of a good politician, in her view, was a solid education, charisma and popularity. Although she was unspecific about her source, she cited a 62% approval rating nationwide as proof of her popularity. "I could pose for 'Playboy', but that would not be politically interesting," she said, quickly adding she had not actually been approached by the publication. Turning serious

again about her presidential bid, she said "someone has to take out the garbage; I'm prepared to do this."

Canak on Gojkovic: A CiTY GiRl With A PAST

¶9. (SBU) Nenad Canak, head of the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats (LSV) told the DCM in a separate meeting March 21 that Gojkovic was only special because she looked and acted like a "city girl," even though she was a founding member of the Radical party and "with them during Srebrenica and Vukovar." Canak said there was no corruption with the previous mayor of Novi Sad, addressing the DCM's question on alleged corruption during the tenure of Borislav Novacovic, Novi Sad's DS mayor until 2004. He added that "the Radicals are the most corrupt and the worst abusers of power possible."

Canak on Tadic: No Angel, but a Good Person

¶10. (SBU) Hinting that his aspirations are purely national, Canak said he had no interest in becoming mayor of Novi Sad. While he had no qualms that Tadic had "made his pact with the devil, and therefore could not be an angel" Canak said he was comfortable with having joined the DS coalition ahead of upcoming May 11 elections. Canak explained a coalition with the DS was important in order to secure the greatest number of MPs.

¶11. (SBU) Arguing that the line between democratic and nationalist forces in Serbia was not clearly defined, Canak told the DCM there were "democratic nationalists and nationalist democrats," with Tadic falling into the latter category. He said that even Tadic, who is pro-EU integration, strongly supported the "Kosovo is Serbia" line. By the same token, Canak said Tadic had accepted him into the current election coalition, knowing that Canak felt Kosovo's outcome was inevitable. Responding to the DCM's question on why Tadic failed to show leadership and get the Interim Political Agreement signed during the critical week in January when the EU had announced its EULEX mission to Kosovo, Canak said Tadic's massive support was based on the electorate knowing that he would not make quick or drastic moves. Comparing Tadic to the late president Djindjic,

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Canak claimed Tadic lacked his Machiavellian wisdom, but conceded he was a better person and had surrounded himself with good advisors, particularly Srdjan Saper and Miodrag Rakic. As an explanation for Tadic's political maneuvering, Canak said foreigners need to understand that Serbian politics is not as it appears. "For Serbia politics -- not sex -- is the poor man's entertainment."

Canak and Gojkovic: agreeMENT on Kosovo and serbia in EU

¶12. (SBU) While Canak and Gojkovic agreed on very little, they were like-minded on two things: the future of Kosovo and Serbia as part of the EU. Canak stated throughout the meeting that integration with Europe should be a top priority and that the

outcome of Kosovo was inevitable. Gojkovic told the DCM if she had to choose what was in the best interest of Serbia, it would be EU integration. She warned however that the Kosovo issue was still too fresh. "No one can expect Serbia to get over Kosovo so easily," she said. Signaling a dispassionate rather than emotional approach to Kosovo, she claimed she thought of Kosovo with her brain, not her heart. In a March 23 interview with Blic, she said "the issue of Kosovo and Metohia can only be solved with Serbia entering Euro-Atlantic integration. Serbia can most help Serbs and non-Albanians as a member of the EU." Gojkovic conceded, when pressed, that she would cooperate with the ICTY, so long as it was in Serbia's best interest, and that joining the EU was in Serbia's interest. She wondered aloud, however, why Serbia was responsible for producing alleged war criminals that might not even be on Serbian soil, referring to Mladic and Karadzic.

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) While clearly confident in herself and her own charisma, Gojkovic still remains an unknown political quantity, and appears willing to be politically elastic to advance her own ambitions. The question is whether she will be able to deliver on her wider political aspirations and agenda. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Canak possesses a similar degree of political flexibility, as his current coalition with Tadic suggests. Both leaders prove that Serbian politics is less about defining yourself and more about defining your adversaries. End Comment.
MUNTER